

March 2008 – Consumer Protection Week, LifeSmarts

Each month, the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) identifies general themes which coincide with the scope and vision of the Department's boards and bureaus. You can view a full listing of events that the DCA will be attending, many of which correspond with the theme of the month, on our [Outreach Events Calendar](#) at www.dca.ca.gov.

National Consumer Protection Week March 2nd – 8th 2008

The Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) is busy protecting consumers all year round, but for one week in March, we are offered a unique chance to highlight what we do. National Consumer Protection Week (NCPW) brings consumer protection into the limelight. This year's theme, "Financial Literacy: a Sound Investment", deals with the learning the financial facts of life. Financially savvy consumers are likely to make better decisions about managing money, using credit, and building a solid financial foundation for the future.

DCA is the leading state agency responsible for protecting consumers. The Department licenses 255 professions, including doctors, dentists, contractors, cosmetologists, and automotive repair facilities. All in all, over 2.4 million Californians are licensed by the DCA. Our mission is to protect and serve consumers while ensuring a competent and fair marketplace.

As a consumer, you conduct transactions on a daily basis which test your financial literacy. Whether it be shopping for a car or a home, understanding a credit card statement, investing in a retirement plan or simply deciding how to pay for a new pair of shoes; education is the your first line of defense. It will guide you to make wise decisions, and protect you from frauds and rip-offs.

LOANS & HOME MORTGAGES

An increasing number of homeowners are living through the nightmare of overwhelming debt and home foreclosure. Many lenders are willing to give loans to almost anyone, regardless of their credit history or financial situation. These loans are categorized as "subprime", which equates to high interest rates and high fees.

There are also some lenders who use fraudulent lending practices. These lenders use flashy advertisement and verbal assurances, while disguising the full details of the loan. Consumers who fall victim to these tactics can quickly find themselves in a tragic financial situation.

During Consumer Protection Week, all Americans should take advantage of an opportunity to learn more about protecting yourself against fraudulent and abusive lending practices. Financial literacy can insure that you and your family are setting reasonable goals which will not come back to haunt you.

You can protect yourself from dangerous loans by taking precautions, including comparison shopping among several lenders, negotiating terms you can afford, and resisting the pressure to sign loan papers you don't understand.

Make sure you understand every line of your loan agreement. Before you sign, you should have every payment mapped out for the entire life of your loan. This will ensure that you are not caught off guard by introductory payment periods and "balloon" payments.

Learn more at www.yourhome.ca.gov (English) or www.sucasa.ca.gov (Spanish)

UNLICENSED ACTIVITY

Consumers who hire unlicensed professionals may think they are getting a good deal. In fact, hiring unlicensed professionals can lead to serious problems. These individuals operate outside the law, and do not follow acceptable standards or abide by a code of conduct. They also hurt the economy and take business away from legitimate professionals who know and follow the rules. Unlicensed professionals offer little or no legal recourse for the consumers who are left dissatisfied by their sub-standard service. Check a license at our Web site (www.dca.ca.gov).

WE ARE HERE TO HELP

In order to promote this year's theme of financial literacy, the Department of Consumer Affairs will be hosting informational booths for consumers at local shopping centers throughout the state. Consumer Information on a wide variety of topics will be made available to the public, free of charge. The following locations have been confirmed.

March 1 - 2 & 8 - 9, 2008;

10:00 AM - 6:00 PM

Montebello Town Center

Montebello, CA 90640

March 1 - 2 & 8 - 9, 2008;

10:00 AM - 6:00 PM

Galleria at Tyler Shopping Center

1299 Galleria at Tyler

Riverside, CA 92503

March 1 - 2 & 8 - 9

10:00 AM - 6:00 PM

Stoneridge Shopping Center

1 Stoneridge Mall Road

Pleasanton, CA 94588

March 1 - 2 & 8 - 9

10:00 AM - 6:00 PM

Hill Top Mall, 2200 Hilltop Mall Rd,

Richmond, CA 94806

DCA is also participating in a series of Foreclosure Prevention Workshops across the state. Visit the Outreach Calendar of Events on the DCA Web site (www.dca.ca.gov) for dates and locations.

For additional on financial literacy, we encourage you to visit the State's Consumer Services Center online at <http://www.consumer-sc.ca.gov/>

LifeSmarts
March 6th, 2008

LifeSmarts was created by the National Consumer League to help students prepare for the common challenges of everyday life, such as applying for credit, shopping wisely, and understanding the rights and responsibilities they have as consumers. The first phase of the competition is Internet-based. Winners move on to in-person state competition and from there to regional and national competitions.

LifeSmarts is open to all teens in grades nine through twelve and is designed to complement school curriculum. Students work in classrooms or with coached teams to learn about credit cards, consumer debt and financial issues that are vital in today's marketplace.

A survey by Teenage Research Unlimited found that teens across America spent \$170 billion of their own money in 2003, up by about 60 percent in only three years. They also found that teens spend an average of \$101 per week. That's more than \$5,000 a year. Teens are consumers!

The Department of Consumer Affairs is working with the National Consumer League to promote LifeSmarts to students and teachers throughout the state. In addition to personal finance, the program encourages high school students to study health and safety, the environment, and technology, and to use what they learn in a fun competition.

To learn more, visit www.lifesmarts.com